

# TEXAS-MEXICANS IN SUGAR BEETS

## Vegetables and Fruits

A Report on Improved Relations  
Between Migratory Farm Workers  
and Agricultural Employers in North  
Central and Great Plains States,  
1943 - 1947



EXTENSION FARM LABOR PROGRAM,  
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Vegetables --- Fruits --- Grains

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January 5, 1948

Extension Farm Labor Program  
United States Department of Agriculture  
Washington, D. C.





UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Extension Service  
Washington 25, D. C.

659851

January 5, 1948

Meredith C. Wilson  
Deputy Director of Extension  
Farm Labor Program  
U. S. Department of Agriculture  
Washington, D. C.

Ide P. Trotter  
Director of Extension Service  
A. & M. College of Texas  
College Station, Texas

Dear Directors Wilson and Trotter:

I humbly submit to you my report on the program developed for Texas migrants who go to the North Central and Plains States. As you know, my association with the program was as a liaison representative working in the field. I hope that it is satisfactory to you that a major portion of this report deals with field activities as I experienced them.

To give these experiences a proper setting in administrative policy, I have called upon Barnard Joy, Clinton Gaylord and Caesar Hohn for assistance. They have been generous in the help that they have given in the preparation of the sections dealing with administrative policies, beginnings of the program, trends, and conclusions.

Valuable help in the preparation of the report has also been received from D. A. Adam who supervised the program during the first seven months of 1947 and from the other thirteen liaison representatives from Texas who had assignments similar to mine. A list of these men and the area to which they were assigned is given below:

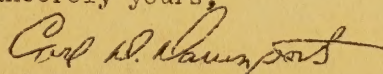
Frank A. Binkley  
Joe W. Derum

Calvin W. Duncan  
Henry B. Guilford, Jr.  
Jack F. Henderson

Gordon L. Lansford  
Robert Meza  
Thomas J. Moon  
Paul G. Moore  
C. P. Rogers  
George Russell  
Thomas H. Shock  
Wm. H. Yaeger, Jr.

Northeastern Colorado  
Red River Valley of Minnesota  
and North Dakota  
Central Nebraska  
Eastern Montana  
Central Montana and Northern  
Wyoming  
Wisconsin and Illinois  
Arkansas Valley, Colorado  
Ohio  
Indiana  
Michigan  
Southern Minnesota and Iowa  
Ohio  
Michigan

Sincerely yours,

  
Carl D. Davenport  
Extension Farm Labor Agent



## THE WAR EMERGENCY

World War II brought economic situations that materially altered the migration. Employment opportunities, largely in war industry, in Texas increased greatly. Migration was no longer a necessity. The economic advantages of migration to the sugar beet areas of earlier years diminished because of new opportunities at or near home. The disadvantages of a migratory way of life when compared with settled living became a much more important consideration than it had been in the past. Despite the wartime need for maximum sugar production and incentives designed to increase production, the Texas-Mexican migrant labor force had diminished to half its prewar volume by 1943. In 1944 it was down to one-third of prewar.

To the agency responsible for "assisting in providing farmers an adequate supply of workers for the production, harvesting and preparation for market of agricultural commodities essential to the prosecution of the war," the disappearance of Texas-Mexican migrants in sugar beet producing areas presented a serious problem. The situations causing the problem were complex. The problem could not be solved by simple recruitment and placement procedures. It could not be solved by substituting a new procedure for the peculiar recruitment, employment, transportation, and housing arrangements that had developed during the past 30 or 40 years. It could not be solved without the cooperation of the sugar beet industry and the Texas-Mexican migrants.

### Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to record the more important situations encountered, methods used, and results obtained by the Cooperative Extension Service in assisting to re-establish and stabilize the Texas-Mexican migratory labor force in the sugar beet producing areas.

The program was based on an understanding of the areas where the migrant workers were needed and upon an understanding of the workers. Unless the program was carried out so that it was helpful to both employer and worker it was doomed to failure--and failure meant less production at a time when production was essential to the war effort and the peace effort which followed.

### Areas and Crops That Need Migrants

Exact geographical location and description of the agricultural areas needing migrant workers is found in a companion publication.<sup>1/</sup> For purposes of this report the areas which are dependent upon Texas Mexicans can be described in three broad categories. First are the irrigated valleys on the eastern slopes of the Rockies and extending into the Great Plains. These valleys are located in Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana, and in the western parts of North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska. Second is the Red River Valley of eastern North Dakota and northwestern Minnesota. Third are the sugar beet and canning crop areas of Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and southern Minnesota.

<sup>1/</sup> Preliminary Survey of Major Areas Requiring Outside Agricultural Labor, EFL Circular No. 38.



Most of the Texas Mexicans are recruited for work in sugar beets. For each 10 acres of sugar beets one worker is needed for six to eight weeks in the spring to block, thin, and hoe the beets. In most areas this work begins late in May and extends into early July. Again in the fall approximately the same number of workers are needed for harvest except for the acreage on which mechanical harvesters are used. Fall harvest is usually a four to six weeks' job starting about October 1 and ending in mid-November.

Between the middle of July and the last of September Texas Mexicans work on a variety of crops, including tomatoes, beans, peas, pickles, onions, potatoes, and fruit. During this interim period the number of workers needed is considerably less than during the spring and fall periods when the big demand is in sugar beets. However, some Texas Mexicans travel north for work other than on sugar beets. The largest group, possibly 5,000, go to Indiana for tomato harvest.

### Migratory Routes

Most of the northward migration starts from San Antonio, Texas. Many workers who spend the winter in the Lower Rio Grande Valley assemble in or near San Antonio before traveling north. San Antonio is the headquarters for most of the recruiting done by the sugar beet companies. The recruiters usually advance travel costs to the crew leader when his crew accepts sugar beet "contracts" and when they are ready to travel north.

The two major routes followed are those from San Antonio to Greeley, Colorado, and San Antonio to Saginaw, Michigan. Many stop before they reach these points, or go beyond, but follow a similar route. A third and smaller group goes from San Antonio to Kansas City. From there some go north to the Red River Valley and others northeast to Wisconsin or southern Minnesota.

The northward movement frequently starts too early, in April. Recruiters are fearful that other recruiters will "steal" their workers so they send them on their way before there is need for them at their destination. Most of those who migrate leave Texas before May 15.

With the close of sugar beet blocking and thinning early in July, there begins a period of confusion. Some migrants find interim work in the area, others travel to nearby areas needing workers in this period, and some return to Texas. Late September finds the sugar beet areas with a worker shortage because many of the Texas Mexicans who have left do not return. Some are re-recruited in Texas and a few who did not go north in the spring make the trip to work in the sugar beet harvest. For most Texas-Mexican migrants, November is the month for going "home."

### Texas Mexicans Are Interesting People

The best way to understand the people who migrate is to let them tell their story as they see it. This section of the report is an attempt to translate from his native tongue the feelings of Domingo Lopez, crew leader, cotton grower, and vegetable raiser of Edinburg, Texas, heart of the south Texas cotton belt. Although it is often difficult to literally



translate Mexican into English, an honest attempt has been made in this narrative in order to give the reader a word picture of the Texas Mexican and his background, character and problems.

This is Domingo's story--told as only a native-born Texas Mexican could tell it.

### Land of Tomorrow

"My people are a peculiar race of people, Senor," he said. "We have our own rules and regulations born of emergency. We come into the world in poverty and very few of us gain much worldly goods. As you can see our homes are small one or two room shacks. Our most prized possession is a worn-out Cucurracha or what you would call a 'jalopy.' My country has always been referred to as the 'Land of Manana,' which when actually translated means 'Land of Tomorrow,' but to us it has become our code of life. Tomorrow - we have had nothing to gain by effort or working hard. We have never had anything and up until recently we have not expected very much. My forefathers were worked to death by the Spaniards and when the Norte Americano came along he took up where the Spaniard left off. We have been the work horse of two superior peoples.

"I, as well as my brother south of the Rio Grande, am the product of several hundred years of intermarriage between the early Spanish Conquistadores and the Indians found on the continent by Cortez. Through the years both the Spanish and the Indian bloods have mingled until we now have what is known as the Mexican. There isn't over a handful of pure Spanish people left in Mexico and not very many actual Indians. Because of their wealth and intelligence the Spanish have always ruled the Indian and later the Mexican. The Dons have always been the landlords, the patrons, and the Mexican has always been the man of the soil .... the peon or poor farmer. He makes barely enough to keep him and his family alive. When he worked for the Spanish patron .... he added more millions to the already bulging coffers of those wealthy land owners.

"In more modern history my people have been able to throw off the yoke of the Spaniards and we have developed what is now known as Mexico. Certainly it was a vast improvement. In the early part of the 19th century these farmers and tillers of the soil began to move north into what is now known as Texas, New Mexico, and California. Since your main interest is Texas, we will, of course, concentrate on the lives of my Texas cousins.

### Texas - A Land of Promise

"In migrating into south Texas, my people retained their Mexican pattern of living. Agriculture was and has ever been our mainstay so we naturally followed that path. The majority of us broke a few acres and planted only enough to feed our immediate families. A few took on a larger acreage and raised cattle and sheep. We all prospered. Heretofore, all we grew or raised had to be turned over to the patron and he gave us back what he pleased. In our new world we grew what we wanted and kept it.

"We made progress. With our background of agriculture, what was to hinder us? .... South Texas had and still does have wonderful soil, climate, and plenty of water.



"Though our advance was slow it was sure for we are by nature a slow people. We do not see the need for hurry through life. Our house was open to all strangers .... food and drink and a night's rest were always available to the traveler. No questions asked and none expected. As most easy going people we had no fear or distrust of any man .... and when the Norte Americano came to live among us we welcomed him wholeheartedly. The new world was big .... there was plenty for all .... and although we were here first we could see no reason why the American couldn't share in our new found wealth and happiness. We, who had been poor and miserable all our lives, could understand the American who we thought only wanted to break a quarter section and make a living.

### Norte Americano - Gringo

"It wasn't long, however, before we saw that these men who were moving in on our lives were not farmers .... they were business men. Exploiters .... land grabbers .... they came to our world for just one thing and that was to grab all the land they could get their hands on. Little by little he took over .... a little here, a little there .... He began to acquire the best lands .... the best water holds .... the best grazing ranges .... he set up his transportation system .... Acre by acre we were shoved out .... do not misunderstand me, Senor, it was done legally .... by business's methods that a Mexican farmer couldn't fathom .... it was simple enough to beat a poor Mexican out of his lands for he was a farmer and these men that were coming in were smart Yankee traders .... Soldiers of fortune .... Do not believe all you read of your early Texan, Senor .... there were many wonderful men but there were also many thieves and cut-throats .... in Texas for one purpose and that was to get all the lands they could acquire to sell to those who came along later.

"In a few years we again found ourselves the serf .... the peon .... the day-by-day worker in the fields .... living in filth and squalor .... no lands or housing of our own but wholly dependent on the generosity of our American landlords .... working for a pittance .... for just what the American landlords wanted to give us. Soon the Norte Americano began to improve and commercialize on the vegetables and fruit that could be grown in Texas. We found ourselves working in vegetable sheds .... juicing plants and other related industries that sprang up .... working for 10 cents an hour. Cotton became one of Texas' leading industries and we worked in the cotton fields picking cotton for 50¢ a hundred pounds.

### Cotton and Migration

"The development of cotton all over the State handed us the best opportunity we have had to improve our lot. It could be grown from Cameron County to Bailey County and soon parts of west Texas began to offer us a little more money to entice us to come to west Texas to pick their cotton. Thus, we began our migratory movement. We could pick cotton in south Texas in July, August, and September of each year and then move on into west Texas for the months of October, November, and December. In this manner we found that we could make more money in six months in this migratory work than we could make if we stayed home all year.



"Up until the last few years we haven't made much money, enough to pay expenses and still have a little left over to keep us living in the winter months when we are back home in south Texas. But still that was better than we could do by staying home and trying to live on the dollar and a half a day our American landlords were offering us.

### Becoming Americans

"In the last five years we have improved our economic status a great deal. We have a little better housing .... true they are still shacks by your standards but you will note they are painted and clean. We are sending our children to school and insisting they get at least a high school education .... more and more we are learning the value of an education .... But what is more important, we are learning to become better American citizens .... in our homes we more and more are speaking the American tongue .... my children talk very poor Mexican .... and they are teaching me to talk American.

"The recent war brought most of this on. As all good citizens our sons and brothers went off to war. Some came back with Congressional Medals of Honor .... some came back with an eye or a leg gone ... and some did not return .... I lost my oldest son three years ago just before Christmas in the Battle of the Bulge in Germany. My people began to understand and want a better way of life. Those that went to war and returned learned a cleaner and more sanitary way of living .... and they passed it on to us that stayed behind. Another development of the war as far as my people were concerned was a tremendous increase in national pride. Because we had fought beside our American neighbors we realized more and more that we were being mistreated at home. All our lives we have been kicked around, lied to, worked for a pittance by these same American people. Now the Texas Mexican had shown that he too was a fighter for the rights of an American citizen .... and he has begun to ask for those rights.

### Wetbacks Complicate Situation

"One of the prime reasons for the present poor economic condition of my people is the 'Mojahc' or wetback situation...illegal entries that swim the Rio Grande River at night to work in the American cotton fields of south Texas. He is a man that can and does work for 25¢ an hour and we Texas-born Mexicans hate him with a deep rooted passion. We do not know of a way to keep this wetback out of Texas. We know the border patrol and other law enforcement agencies along the Texas-Mexican border do their best, but it is an impossible situation. It has been often stated that if an officer was placed every 10 feet along the Rio Grande, which, of course, is an impossibility, the wetback still couldn't be kept out of south Texas. Naturally there are laws but if they were rigidly enforced every jail from Brownsville, Texas, to Washington, D. C., would be running over. All the authorities can do is 'raid' a vegetable shed or a cotton field, pick up a truck load of wetbacks, take them to the border, shove them across the bridge and go back for another load. The wetback returns home for a night or two, gets his brother and his three cousins and they all come on back to the American side. There are many cases, Senor, where the same wetback has been picked up many times in the same cotton season. He has nothing to lose and if can make \$20.00 or so, that is \$100.00 in his money .... more money than he will make in three months in Mexico.



Forced to Migrate

"Because of these and other less important conditions my people have been pushed further and further along the road in their travels. As American citizens we cannot live on the wages offered us so we take to the road from June to December. We are gypsies in every sense of the word except we don't tell fortunes. Some of us make reasonable money and some don't. Some of us manage to save a little."

Domingo's story helps us to understand the Texas Mexican and his migratory wanderings .... also ~~his~~ background and his reasons for his wanderings. It would appear that the fundamental reason for his travels is his not being able to make a living at home. Economic necessity pushes him on and on.

## EXTENSION TACKLES A PROBLEM

Obtaining gasoline and tires so that Texas Mexicans could get from Texas to the sugar beet areas brought the sugar companies and Extension together in 1943, 1944, and 1945. OPA had the responsibility for the wartime rationing of the limited supply of gas and tires. They recognized that gas needed by migrant workers to travel from one job to another was essential. However, local OPA boards had quotas and were hesitant to allot from their limited supply the amount needed by migrants for rather long trips. They did want to know that the people who requested such allotments really were farm workers and that they were needed and had a job at the destination shown on their applications.

Extension Service, the agency responsible for farm labor, was asked to certify that the applicants were bona fide farm workers who were needed at the destination given on their applications. They also wanted to know that by giving these workers gas for travel that the local employers were not losing workers essential to local agricultural or nonagricultural production.

At the early conferences, the atmosphere was one of bargaining and mistrust between representatives of sugar companies and Extension and between Texas and the "sugar beet" States. The sugar beet companies had over the years developed their own system for the recruitment, transportation, and employment of Texas Mexicans. These companies had annually spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on this work.

From their point of view their previous relationships with government agencies had been that the agencies had criticized and tried to regulate or control their activities. This was particularly true of the Texas Labor Commission which required expensive licenses of those recruiting labor for work in other States and registration of workers recruited. Such regulation and control made the recruitment activity more difficult and expensive and the sugar companies as a group resisted it. There was also some suspicion among the sugar companies themselves, as with several recruiters working in the same area at the same time their activities were competitive and "jefes" bargained with recruiters to obtain the best deal.

At the early conferences, Extension was in the "middle." Sugar companies wanted as many workers as they could get and no "red tape." Wartime conditions had resulted in labor shortage in Texas. They didn't want people to leave. Extension workers could not do the recruiting job -- and nobody wanted them to do so -- as substitution of procedures that could be followed by a government agency for those that had been developed over a period of thirty years would have reduced the migration to a trickle.

### New Policy Is Developed

As usual, such conferences ended in compromises. In this case they involved working together on the part of the sugar companies and Extension and on the part of Texas and the sugar beet producing States. The policy governing this relationship was set forth at that time as follows:



"Under the Farm Labor Supply Act (Public Laws 229 and 529 - 78th Congress) the Cooperative Extension Service of the War Food Administration and the State Agriculture Colleges are responsible for the domestic labor phases of the program 'for assisting in providing an adequate supply of workers for the production, harvesting, and preparation for markets of agricultural commodities essential to the prosecution of the war.' In performing this function the Extension Service is desirous of maintaining established movements of agricultural workers. It aims to supplement, not to displace, the efforts of agricultural producers to recruit workers and of agricultural workers to find employment. Both employers and workers are to be encouraged to use their own initiative in making employment arrangements and in solving employment problems. Employment relationships which have proven satisfactory are to be maintained in so far as possible.

"The recruitment of migratory workers in Texas to be moved to sugar beet areas in the North Central and Plains States, will be conducted in accordance with State laws applying to such activities, and in accordance with Federal government regulations relating to the conservation of gasoline and tires."

For purpose of this report, the most significant aspect of the 1943, 1944, 1945 experiences was that suspicion and mistrust were replaced by confidence and understanding. Sugar companies learned that Extension was trying to help them. The sugar beet States learned that Texas would meet them halfway if they returned the compliment. All involved developed a much better understanding of each other's problems and of the mutual advantages of working together. There was beginning to be a change in attitude toward the workers. Texas Mexicans were not quite as much "so many thousand production units" and a little more "American citizens doing their part in the war effort" than had been true previously.

#### Texas Develops A New Idea

Texas has a migratory movement of its own that is larger in number of workers than the movement to the sugar beet States. Most of the 60,000 to 80,000 workers who follow the cotton harvest from south to central to west Texas are Texas Mexicans. Most of them spend the winter in the four Lower Rio Grande Valley Counties (Starr, Hidalgo, Willacy, and Cameron) in south Texas. The Texas Extension Service developed a program to more fully utilize their labor and so that they might have more continuous employment.

I am devoting the next few pages of this report to the Texas problem, as the techniques used to solve it are the background for the program evolved for the migration to the sugar beet States. I am also telling this story in the first person -- the way I saw it, working with the migrants and farmers in the field.

The Texas Mexicans travel mainly by truck and are divided up into what is known as crews and the truck owner is generally the crew leader. However, this is not always the case. These crews range in number from five or six to as many as fifty or sixty people. They are not all workers as the crews comprise the women and children of the workers as well as the workers themselves. The crew leader directs the route and work of his crew -- he is the "segundo" or straw boss when his crew is in the field. He derives his income from hauling the cotton, which is picked by his crew, from the field to the

nearest cotton gin. He usually gets from \$0.35 to \$0.75 per hundred for hauling. The crew leader, or "jefe" as he is called in Mexican, will loan his crew money if they need it. He will stake them to groceries or cotton sacks or other necessary equipment.

### Catch-As-Catch-Can System

The majority of these people start their migratory trek in July of each year. They begin by picking the cotton in the deep south of Texas -- Hidalgo, Willacy, and Cameron Counties. After approximately twenty days in this area they begin to spill over into the Gulf Coast area which includes Sinton, Robstown, Corpus Christi, Port Lavaca, and Victoria. After working in this area another thirty days or so they will head for central Texas up around Waco and Temple. About this time of the year, Arkansas cotton begins to open up and some of the Mexicans, after working the central area, will split and go east into Arkansas and the remainder will go on up into west Texas in and around Lubbock, Loveland, and Plainview.

Until recent years, this movement has been on a catch-as-catch-can basis. The average cotton picking crew would just start out along the highways leading north out of south Texas, see a field of cotton, pick part of it and pull out for the next field, often leaving a farmer with half of his cotton picked and the other half still untouched. This, of course, caused the loss of untold man hours -- hours that our nation needed in time of war. The Mexican would just drift around unwelcome in many communities -- communities that vitally needed the services that could be rendered by the Mexican cotton picker. This unguided wandering was not wholly the fault of the Mexican. He had never had any direction -- nobody cared too much what happened to him. The Mexican felt that it was a total loss of time to inquire about crop conditions at employment service offices for half the time the well-dressed "gringo" standing behind that beautifully polished desk didn't understand the Mexican. So the Mexicans would just drift around .....make a little money .... see a little of the country .... and go on back home having accomplished very little.

### Hohn An Understanding Leader

By an act of Congress the Extension Service was handed the farm labor program. By an act of God, Caesar (Dutch) Hohn of Texas A. & M. College was selected to lead the farm labor program in Texas. Mr. Hohn was admirably suited to the job. He had been an Extension County Agent in Texas for many years -- he was born on a farm and had managed a large ranch in Texas, employing many Texas Mexicans; but most of all, he had a deep-rooted feeling that if the other fellow was treated right, regardless of color or creed, he would react accordingly. Mr. Hohn knew Mexicans -- he spoke Mexican fluently, he worked with them, visited in their homes, talked to their children, and ate with them. He understood what went on in their minds and hearts and he felt that if he could interest a group of men who thought as he did, he believed that he could make some headway with what was later called, in the July 27, 1946, issue of the Saturday Evening Post, "Dutch Hohn's Controlled Migration."



Among some of the first fieldmen Mr. Hohn put on the job were Russell Patterson, ex-farmer and border range rider, A. C. (Jack) Arnim, ex-Texas Ranger, Herman Porter, ex-Texas Cattlemen's Association Investigator. These men, and those to follow, all had one thing in common -- they all spoke Mexican. They spoke it so well that when they would meet they would converse in the Mexican tongue. They were not ashamed and certainly not afraid to walk into a Mexican shack at night and sit down and drink coffee. They could squat down in some hot, dusty Texas cottonfield and be at home with the Mexican worker because they spoke his language and knew his problem.

The Mexican came to realize that here was a "gringo" who understood his way of life and knew his troubles -- an American in whom he could confide. Caesar Hohn's principal instruction to these fieldmen was "Tell them the truth." Hohn knew that we had to gain the confidence of the Texas Mexican before we could do anything. Hohn told us that we could work out our own methods of operation, that we could set up any schedule we wished, work any way that fitted in with our various areas, but in all cases, regardless of when it hurt, to report conditions as we knew them to be. In other words, if an area in Texas had poor cotton or poor housing, or if the Mexicans were not treated fairly, we were to report it just that way and under no circumstances to cloud or muddle the situation.

#### Winning the Confidence of Migrants

Hohn began the program by sending us into the home territory of the Texas Mexicans during the winter months. We visited with them in their homes -- in the "cantinas" at the Mexican picture houses, at the ball games, and "bailes." It was slow and sometimes discouraging work. We were not received with open arms for the Mexicans were suspicious of us. It was impossible for them to grasp that here was a "gringo" offering to help them. I have been asked many times "How much will this cost me?" or "What cotton gin are you working for?" I have driven up to a group standing in the front yard of a house and have them disband like a covey of quail .... just walk away thinking that I was a border patrolman or government inspector of some kind. They just couldn't understand that I wasn't some sort of government man sent there to spy on them for some reason or another.

It was apparent from the beginning that we would have to tackle this situation from another angle. Pasqual Villarreal, one of our best fieldmen, got a loud speaker and attached it to his pick-up truck. On Sunday afternoons he would ride through the streets telling the Mexicans that there would be a meeting tonight in the local theater or dance hall. We went into the Mexican picture shows and got the management to stop the picture in the middle and let us talk to the people. That way they almost HAD to listen.

We enlisted the aid of the Catholic Church, got the priests to make announcements for us, and the Mexican radio stations announced our meetings. We contacted influential Mexican citizens of the various towns to spread the word around that an Extension Farm Labor Agent was in the area with all the latest crop information -- latest information as to housing and wages, highway information, weather conditions -- everything of interest to the Texas Mexican cotton picker.

Our one purpose in getting before these people was to establish our identity in the agricultural picture of Texas. We wanted these people to start looking to us for information regarding cotton conditions. For purposes of quick identification Mr. Hohn designed an American-Mexican cross-flag insignia for the fieldmen. It pictured the two cross-flags with a shock of wheat in the bottom triangle of the flags and a boll of cotton in the top triangle. This was put on a badge which we wore all the time. We wanted the Texas Mexican to see and recognize that badge and to know that the wearer was an Extension Farm Labor Agent and a man who would have the latest information on agricultural conditions over the area. It was made into large placards which could be attached to the front or rear bumpers of our cars when we were stationed at some highway intersection -- something that the trucker could see for three hundred yards in order to stop and check with us before going on. Our ultimate aim was a better and fuller utilization of all available labor. We wanted these people to have faith in us so that if an area needed a thousand cotton pickers we could direct them into the area without loss of time and labor.

### "See Your County Agent"

Few Mexicans had ever heard of the County Agricultural Agent nor had they any idea of his duties. Our battle cry was "See the County Agent." If you have finished a job and want to move on to another area don't just go blindly. See the local County Agent and find out conditions in the area to which you want to transfer. True, they might have had good cotton in that area a couple of days ago, but who knows .... they may have had several inches of rain there last night and you would be making a trip for nothing, thus losing time and money.

We knew that they were becoming interested because they would check on us. It was beginning to add up to the Mexican now for you could see his mind working and you could read his thoughts... "Here is an American who spoke Mexican like a Mexican, drank a Mexican's coffee, patted a Mexican's baby and inquired of the health of the mother of the house." ... "Here was a man who fitted into the Mexican's household -- maybe he was telling the truth .... we'll see." The Mexican wasn't in any hurry; as a matter of fact no Mexican gets in a hurry about anything. So the Mexican figured that if the American was honest in his sayings then time would tell.

As we progressed further in our work we found that in this, as with all things, there were two sides. As the Mexican began to open up and ask us questions we found out that a great deal of our trouble lay with the farmer. Poor housing was one of the worst complaints and discrimination was another. It became increasingly apparent that we also had to do some farmer education .... impress on the farmer that these people were human beings and had to be treated as such. They had to have the essentials. I had many a Texas Mexican tell me that he had quit a farmer because the farmer refused to let him draw water from his well. I have had Texas Mexicans tell me that a grocery store manager wouldn't let them buy the needed groceries because the workers were dirty and smelly. Picture shows refused to let them in, churches refused them entrance, filling station operators refused them the use of their toilet facilities or water for their water barrels, and police refused to let them sleep on school grounds or court house lawns.



In many cases it was understandable from the farmer's or merchant's viewpoint. The Texas Mexicans rode hundreds of miles in an open truck with no chance for a bath .... naturally they smelled and were dirty. Any human body will begin to stink after a few days without a bath. Many of the complaints of the farmers and merchants were justifiable. What could we do about it and how could we correct a condition which was causing much of our trouble? The answer was to set up some sort of housing--toilets and showers--strategically located so that migratory crews could reach it in one day of driving .... so that they could spend the night, take a bath, and make themselves as presentable as possible before going to the grocery store, show, or church.

### We Travel With the Workers

Mr. Hohn decided that as the Texas Mexicans started their migration out of south Texas that we would travel with them to direct them along the way -- by placing ourselves at highway intersections displaying our large American-Mexican cross-flag insignias, an insignia with which they had become well acquainted. As we went along with them to the various areas we would not only guide them to the areas where they were most needed, but we would meet with various influential groups of men of the different towns .... civic clubs, county commissioners, merchants, clergymen, or anyone interested in listening to the plan we had.

Mr. Hohn had set up a reception center project for us. The idea was to erect reception centers in the areas using Texas-Mexican cotton pickers. The Extension Service would put up \$300.00 and the community had to match it and could, of course, add as much more as they wished. It was not a housing project in any sense of the word -- just a reception center where the migratory workers could park their trucks. It was to be equipped with showers and toilets and it should have a place for cooking and should have some sort of building for cover. As we outlined our project to the various interested parties they began to see the merit of such a deal. Here was a chance to keep the Texas Mexican off the school grounds, out of the filling station toilets -- a place for the traveler to spend the night, to clean up and wash his clothes before going to town -- and it was also a labor center for the farmer -- a place for the farmer to come to to find his labor.

In many areas it caught on like wild fire. Big Springs, Texas, spent \$8,000.00 on their reception center. Corpus Christi, Texas, put up four reception centers at a cost of around \$15,000.00. Sinton, Port Lavaca, Brady, San Angelo, Loveland, Lubbock, and Lamesa, Texas, all put up migratory reception centers. These centers were financed by civic clubs, merchants' associations, churches, farmers, county governments -- it was a community project. The Extension Service furnished a farm labor assistant at each center at the peak harvest periods -- a man whose sole job was to act as liaison between the farmer and the worker .... to help the farmer get labor and to help the Mexican find a job. The farmer was tickled, the merchant was happy, and the worker couldn't believe his eyes.

By this time the Extension Service had printed a reception center booklet, in Mexican, which showed the location of every center in Texas and the facilities available. It contained a map showing the cotton growing counties in Texas with all the information the Mexican cotton picker needed for the year. This helped us in directing the cotton picker to the area

where he was most needed. If he told us he was going to Sinton and we knew that the Sinton cotton was ready and labor was needed we would pat him on the back and wish him a good and prosperous trip; but if, on the other hand, he said he was going to Port Lavaca, Texas, and we KNEW from telephone and wire reports from our agents that the Port Lavaca cotton was not open yet than we would show him our reports and tell him not to go to Port Lavaca but to work around Sinton or Corpus Christi. Thus, we were able to maintain "Dutch Hohn's Controlled Migration." In my work I have turned as many as 700 workers a day away from an area already crowded with more workers than were needed.

### Keeping in Middle of Road

I acted as liaison between the farmer and worker. This involved working with the cotton picker in the fields and helping him make more money by keeping satisfied, pointing out his responsibilities to the farmer. It also involved helping the farmer make more money by getting his cotton out, getting the farmer to stack a little wood alongside the labor house, getting the farmer's wife to bring out a little milk for the migrant children or give them a fryer occasionally. All those things tend to make the Mexican feel a little better. The Mexicans understand "a little something for nothing" -- the "pelone" or gift. In Mexico if candy is five sticks for a nickel the merchant always throws in an extra stick for "pelone." It is tradition and the Mexican understands it. And when the farmer brings out a little milk or a fryer or does a little extra for "free" the Mexican appreciates it -- feels that the farmer has his welfare at heart.

My experiences are typical of all the other Texas fieldmen, for we all run into about the same things and we solve them in about the same manner. And we don't stop just because the clock happens to point at 5:00 P.M. or it happens to be twelve noon on Saturday. We stay with the job until it is done. It is a job requiring attention every day in the week -- Sundays included.

In the early part of 1946 the beet growing States to the north and east of Texas became interested in our operations. Because of a relatively poor cotton crop in Texas we found that a great many of our Texas cotton workers were going into the northern States to harvest the vegetables and beets and other field crops. Of course, this migration had been going on for many years, but in the year 1946 there was a decided increase in the migration. The sugar companies had always come into Texas and recruited a number of Texas labor for the beet thinning and beet topping seasons, but this year we found that a considerable quantity of our labor was going up into the beet areas "on their own." I mean by that that they were going on their own expenses.

Acting upon invitation and request of the sugar companies and Extension Farm Labor Supervisors, six of our fieldmen went to the different States -- Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, and I was sent to Nebraska. Our purpose was to again act as liaison between the worker and farmer. We had heard various adverse and uncomplimentary reports from Texas labor that went into the different beet States. We heard cases of mistreatment and mishandling of the Texas worker. Extension wanted to know more about these things and if possible correct them. It was felt that if the northern States could have the services of the Mexican speaking extension men from Texas, it would facilitate the gathering of the beet and vegetable crops -- food



badly needed not only in the United States but in other nations as well. The six of us were on an "experimental" basis in 1946 and did the best we could in a new situation.

## MY JOB AS A LIAISON REPRESENTATIVE

In September of 1946 I was sent to Scottsbluff, Nebraska. My assignment was "experimental." About 2,500 Texas Mexicans were in this area. Most of them had been recruited by the sugar companies but some of them had come up on their own -- not only to top beets but to pick potatoes. Since the area was absolutely new to me I began to survey the territory and to talk with farmers -- sort of getting the low-down on things in general. In this I was aided materially by the sugar companies. They placed one of their fieldmen at my side and together we went over the territory. I knew absolutely nothing about beets and not too much about potatoes -- the two main crops of this part of the State. In our travels over the area I ran across many of my old Mexican friends from Texas and they welcomed me with wide grins and buckets of their atrocious coffee. I heard many complaints from the Texas worker -- poor wages, misrepresentation of crop conditions and working conditions, and above all poor housing.

### Quite Different Than Texas

Needless to say, Nebraska was far different than Texas. Here we had one common and relentless enemy -- cold weather. Here we had among the farmers, people with Russian, Japanese, German, and Polish backgrounds. They were hard, cold people, but successful farmers. Many of them were lacking in the basic human qualities of neighborliness among themselves and they surely didn't treat their labor with any decency.

Naturally, this condition was not general in the area but there was enough of it to cause trouble among the Texas labor. It seemed to me that we would have to bear down on farmer education if we ever got anywhere in Nebraska. Of course, a lot of the trouble was caused by the recruiting agencies in Texas. Some workers had been promised everything -- hot and cold running water in the labor houses, plenty of work and that he could make \$15.00 a day. The worker got up into Nebraska and found that those promises were not forthcoming and never would be. Of course, most recruiting agents got \$20.00 a head for every worker brought up into the area. It didn't make any difference to the agent what happened to the worker after he left San Antonio, Texas.

These were some of the evils I ran into in the Nebraska area. I couldn't do much in the six weeks I was there except work with the Texas people and to try to get houses waterproofed by talking to the farmer to get him to repair his house a little. I explained that no man would work ten hours a day in a beet field and come home to a house that couldn't be heated -- not getting his sleep day in and day out. No man could hold up to that for long. With the help of the County Agents we managed to get a few of the houses fixed up a little. We went to the local merchants and got pasteboard boxes and ripped them up and nailed them to the insides of the houses. Paper is a wonderful insulator against cold. We fixed up thirty-five or forty houses in that manner. It was a terrible fire hazard but fortunately we didn't have a fire anywhere.



## Ease in Getting PW's Caused Problems

The trouble with these farmers was that they were spoiled. Many of them had obtained labor from prisoner of war camps for the last four years. If the farmer wanted ten men all he had to do was ask for them and he got them. They were delivered to his front yard in the morning and they were picked up at night. And if he didn't like one or two of them all he had to do was to tell the soldier in charge and they would be replaced. It was a wonderful deal for the farmer. The labor housing which the farmer then had was either occupied by a relative or else was hauled to town and sold. Consequently, when the war was over he didn't have any housing.

In November I returned to Texas to do some more educational work among the Texas people. Although I did not stay long in Nebraska in 1946 I was there long enough to get an inkling of what was causing the trouble.

On December 5 and 6, 1946, a conference of Extension people and agricultural employers from the entire area was called at College Station, Texas, the purpose of which was to bring together the thinking and planning of the various people interested in the Texas Mexican migratory movement as related to the sugar beet and vegetable areas to the north and east of Texas. It was felt by all parties concerned that the liaison work done by the Extension fieldmen in early 1946 with the sugar beet workers had improved conditions to some extent, but that there was much to be done yet in the way of education, both with the workers and with the beet and vegetable farmers.

As one of the fieldmen present, I got the impression that the agricultural employers certainly appreciated what the Extension Service was trying to do and intended to place all their facilities at the disposal of the Extension Service. Frankly, I was a little skeptical, because my experiences with the various employers and their operational procedures as regards Texas-Mexican workers were none too pleasant. But, in all fairness, it did seem that these top flight men of the different companies were awakening to the program that we were trying to carry out .... "in order to get the fuller utilization of the Texas-Mexican labor it was necessary to provide the essentials, better housing, and better treatment."

## We Participate in Regional Conference

At this conference, I, along with the five other liaison men present that had previously been up into the sugar beet and vegetable growing States to the north, related my experiences and made suggestions for the coming year. The primary requisite was improvement of housing. We pointed out to the interested parties that these Mexicans were from a hot country and they had to have a weatherproof house if they were to stay and work. We also strongly suggested the discontinuance of withholding a certain amount of the worker's pay. This was done by the farmers with the thought that if part of the worker's pay was held back the worker was tied down and would not move. This was a most ridiculous assumption. If as much as a dollar is held out of a Texas-Mexican's pay he will not do another lick until he is paid in full. He feels that the farmer or the company has cheated him and he cannot see any reason to let the company or the farmer cheat him further. What we tried to point out to the processors was that the workers felt that if fifteen or twenty dollars was held out of their pay they could not see why they should

continue working only to let the farmer or the company hold out more money. They just considered the money held out a loss, and quit and either left the country or went to some other farmer to work.

### Housing and Wages

We kept telling our story to the processors for in the final analysis they were the people that could enforce any operation. They had their own fieldmen who were in direct contact with the farmers at all times and the farmers did what the fieldmen told them to do in regard to their labor. We just had to convince the companies of the foolishness of trying to get the worker to put in a day's work when he lived in a house that could not be heated or one that leaked when it rained, or when part of his pay was withheld.

Another bad practice of the agricultural employers was that of bringing the Texas migrants into the areas too early. True, timing of farm work depends to a great extent on weather conditions, but we had found many cases where the worker was brought into the territory as much as 30 days before he could do any farm work. In other words, the worker many times had to just sit around for 30 days before he made any money. Somebody had to finance him, had to buy him food and clothing, and pay doctor bills. I didn't know of any processing companies helping out to any great extent in this matter. Of course, they had their recruiters working in south Texas operating on a per head basis and these men were not worried about conditions in the northern States. All they were interested in was the number of men they could get and how much money they personally could make. After lengthy discussion on this subject the interested agricultural employers promised to try to work out a better system of recruiting.

### Recreation and Community Acceptance

Another condition we felt retarded the better utilization of labor was the lack of recreation for the Texas-Mexican workers. These people need some outlet for their energies. They are accustomed to Saturday night dances and Mexican picture shows. We pointed this out to the interested employers and asked their cooperation in setting up these elementary forms of recreation for the Texas people. In this they quickly agreed and definitely promised to help in the matter. If there is some form of recreational program for these people it shows them that we have their interests at heart and they appreciate our efforts and respond accordingly.

Many other suggestions for improvement of handling of the Mexican migrants were made both by the Extension Service and by the agricultural employers themselves. Religious facilities were definitely lacking in the northern areas. The largest majority of the Mexican people are very devout people and want to attend church every Sunday. It was strongly suggested that the Catholic church be contacted and some arrangement be made for a place for these people to worship in their own manner .... if necessary, hire a special hall or house for them. This the employers promised they would arrange, of course, with the cooperation of the Catholic church.



Another of our bottlenecks was the problem of interim employment. In the sugar beet areas there is a period of about two months between the blocking and thinning season to the topping or final harvest. It has always been the habit of the Texas-Mexican people to leave an area immediately after the blocking season to look for other employment. We pointed out to the employers that these people had to keep working to keep eating, since very few of them were able to save much money. It was agreed that this was a definite challenge to the farmers and something had to be done about it.

An educational program among the farmers was outlined which included the planting of interim crops, beans, and other short term vegetables. The employers promised they would contact railroads and other employers and ask them to use the Texas-Mexican worker in his off-season .... anything to keep that worker busy during the interim periods.

As we neared the end of our meeting I felt that all concerned had reached a better understanding of the Texas-Mexican migratory worker and his problems. I also felt that I had a better understanding of the viewpoint of the various employers in their handling of the workers.

#### Winter Work in South Texas

At the conclusion of the conference it was agreed to send the liaison men back into south Texas to do more educational work among the Texas migrants, during the winter months. Basing our action from past experiences it was recognized that the Extension Service and the Extension liaison men should concentrate more on the Mexican workers that had been making the migration to the beet and vegetable areas in the past, acquaint them with the program that was being worked out for them and also further point out to them their increased responsibilities. As a result of this conference the liaison fieldmen were assigned to different parts of south Texas.

It was also agreed that the Extension liaison men who had worked in the northern areas had done a good job and that they could do better if sent back again. With the assurance of full cooperation of the northern Extension Services and the sugar and canning companies, consideration was given to the number of men needed to "work" the widely separated areas with efficiency. As a result, 14 "work" assignments were laid out and the Texas Extension Service was asked to find eight more men in addition to the six who had worked in 1946. These men were cooperative employees with half their salary paid by the Texas Extension Service and half by the Federal Extension Service.

As we went back to south Texas we again personally contacted hundreds of migratory crew leaders, explaining in detail the many advantages of their full cooperation. We went into their homes, into Mexican picture shows, churches, and schools. We went on the radio, attended Mexican baseball games on Sundays and talked over the public address system to the Mexican people. On Saturdays we would meet many Texas-Mexican migrants at the markets and in the "cantinas" and again and again we would pound our story home: Do a good job, fulfill your contract, and if you get in trouble we will be there to help.

We had booklets that showed where every Extension fieldman would be located in the northern areas. We told them that if they did a good job we would stand by them in any emergency. We pointed out that we would be there to help them in all cases, but only if they were honest and faithful to their agreements. We stressed that we were not there to take sides but rather as a referee and no more. We told them we would help them get jobs when they finished their contracts. We asked them to come and see us when they were through with a job, we would find another for them.

We were well received in this program. In the last two years we had laid a groundwork that had taken effect and they knew by now that we meant what we said. We would help them only if they "played the game."

### Questions Were Raised

Of course, there were two sides to this situation. The Mexicans were quick to point out the mistreatment they had received at the hands of the northern and eastern employers. We told them of the recent conference we had attended at College Station and its results. We told them that as their representatives at the conference we had brought many of these complaints up and that the different employers had promised that they would be remedied.

The Mexican migratory workers were exceptionally well pleased that we would be working with them in the northern areas. We held many "juntas," large and small. Sometimes we had an attendance of ten or fifteen and at other times there would be as many as four hundred. Regardless of how many were present we would always present our program in detail. We also talked before the different civic clubs outlining what we were trying to do. It is our past experience that many of these civic club members are employers of numbers of our migrants during the winter months. These employers have a great influence with the migrants and we asked their help in getting the migrants to keep in contact with us. In other words, if Mr. Brown, owner of the local grocery store had one of our crew leaders working for him and he knew that the "jefe" was about to take off on his yearly trip, the store owner would tell the "jefe" to check with us at one of our informational offices before he left. In this manner we would direct that "jefe" and his crew where they were needed the most.

The State and local police worked very closely with us. Many times I have had the highway patrol call me and tell me that there were two or three crews gassing up at a certain station. I would find them and quite often they would be headed into an area that already had plenty of labor.

This was our program in the month of December 1946 and January and February of 1947. Personal contact .... always personal contact. No letters or propaganda but down-to-earth discussion of crops and wages and living conditions.

### A New Attitude Appears

I noticed a tremendous difference in the attitude of the Mexican worker. We had made good in our previous promises to them. We had not only saved them time and travel in our Texas program, but we had helped them make more money than they had ever made. It was reasonable to them that we could



do the same thing in the sugar beet and vegetable areas. The Texas Mexican is a rational man, believing mainly in what he can see and feel. We had no trouble this time in going into the homes of these people. We were welcomed with open arms. The mother would quit washing clothes, the son would stop working on the truck, and the head of the house would offer coffee and smokes. They would all gather around and listen closely .... and ask questions.

Because we had treated these people decently, each of the fieldmen had his own following of people. I have talked to crew leaders and had them ask me where I would be stationed and after I told them they informed me that they would follow me .... because they believed that they would get a square deal wherever I was. It was the same with all the other liaison men. They had learned to know us and what we stood for. They knew our cross-flag emblem and understood that wherever that emblem was there was a man that would help them with their problems.

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## UNDERSTANDING BEGINS TO PRODUCE RESULTS

Late in March 1947 I returned to Nebraska. My area for the season included western Nebraska and eastern Wyoming. Scottsbluff, Nebraska, which was headquarters, and Torrington, Wyoming, were the principal towns in the area. It consisted principally of the 100 mile long irrigated lands on either side of North Platte River.

### Meetings With Farmers

I checked in with Mr. L. F. Snipes, Nebraska State Supervisor of Farm Labor. He told me that the Extension Service in cooperation with the Great Western Sugar Company was sponsoring a Beet Machinery Caravan displaying new beet machinery over Nebraska. He asked me to join the caravan at Alliance, Nebraska, and travel with it as long as possible .... in this manner I would get to meet many beet farmers. This I agreed to do, of course .... anything to get before as many farmers as possible before the beet season opened and Texas labor started coming into the area.

I traveled with the caravan for fifteen days. The program called for a beet machinery demonstration every day in a different town. Machinery was demonstrated during the day until 2:00 P.M. and then all the farmers met in the court house or a school house. They were shown motion pictures of machinery in operation and after that was over I was given an opportunity to identify myself and my purpose for being in Nebraska. I pointed out to the farmers what they had to do if they expected to get and keep the Texas labor in their area for the beet harvest. I saw many nods of approval while I talked. All told I spoke to over 1,500 farmers as we moved from town to town.

I continued my educational work among the farmers for the remainder of March. Mr. Adam came to my area early in April. He was on a tour over the different beet States, meeting with State Supervisors, County Agents, and Farm Labor Assistants, explaining our purpose in the different areas, our aims and objectives .... pointing out how we could help the County Agents, the farmers, and the workers. Mr. Adam met with the various processing companies in the northern and eastern States, outlining our program to them -- impressing the importance of their full cooperation, asking them to help us in our education of the farmer and the Mexican workers, pointing out the vital necessity of better housing and better understanding of the worker's problems.

As a result of these conferences many of the processing company employees and the County Agents began to understand the Texas workers' viewpoint. In other words, Mr. Adam helped them to see the things that had to be remedied if they expected to continue using Texas-Mexican workers. They began to realize more fully that the Mexican had to be properly housed -- had to be treated as a human being and most of all as an American citizen who had fought and bled and died beside their own sons for the same reason. Most of these agricultural people were good people, but the war years had blinded them. They had been making good money .... plenty of POW and Mexican National labor .... and they had just forgotten that the Texans were their basic source of labor and good workers if treated right.



## A Guide for Migrants

Upon completion of his educational tour Mr. Adam returned to Texas and to perfect the machinery to handle the Texas-to-Beet-States migratory movements. He set up an informational guide in the form of a booklet that was handed to the potential beet migrants in Texas. This booklet contained the names and photographs of the Extension Farm Labor Agents in the beet States and their addresses. Mr. Adam developed a map showing the beet-growing areas in the northern States and the best highway routes to the different areas. It was similar to the Texas cotton guide except that it referred to the different beet areas. This was given to the migrants in their homes, at the reception centers and at our information offices. We had set up these information offices in the thickly concentrated labor areas in Texas. They were maintained at San Benito, Raymondville, Edinburg, Corpus Christi, Brady, and our main office was at San Antonio, Texas.

As the beet labor cleared through these offices, they were informed of the location of the liaison representatives in the various States and they were told that those men were there to help them. They were also told of the information offices and reception centers that had been erected for them along the routes leading into the beet States. We had offices or centers at Garden City, Kansas, and McCook, Nebraska, Dumas, Texas, Possum Grape, Arkansas, and at other points along the way. The workers were told to check with the "liaison man" upon arrival in their area of work and to let him know that they were in the territory .... go to him with your troubles and misunderstandings .... he can help you in Nebraska or Ohio or Colorado just as he has helped you in Texas.

Meanwhile, I had been spending my time contacting farmers, County Agents, food processing organizations, and other interested people with a view in mind of improving conditions in the area .... trying to impress on the farmers the necessity of improving his labor housing .... informing the farmer that I was in the area to help in any way day or night. In most cases I was welcomed with open arms. A great many of the farmers were earnest in their desire to improve conditions, but they were short of material, especially in the construction of housing.

I checked with local lumber yards, talking to the owners and managers and explaining the situation and we got a lot of lumber diverted to farmers in that manner. We talked to the local electric light people getting them to wire labor housing. Not one house in ten had wiring and the light people were busy, but after I explained things to them they managed to spare a man to do the necessary wiring. A great many of the houses had no heating equipment. We managed to get a lot of stoves from the surrounding deactivated Army and POW camps .... anything to improve that labor house.

## Farmer Attitude Changes

As I worked over my area I noticed a change in the attitude of the farmer. More and more he was becoming anxious to improve conditions, and, naturally, as he improved conditions around his farm so also was his attitude changed in the handling of his labor.

As the workers began to come into the area they began to let me know where they were located. As troubles and misunderstandings came up they started to bring them to me. This also applied to the farmer. He understood that I was not there to take the worker's side, but I was there to help straighten out things in general. It was the little things that counted. If we could get in on at the beginning we could get straightened out these little things to the satisfaction of all concerned. If they were not recognized and reported they finally got to the stage that nobody could do any good. The workers blow up and the farmer gets mad .... and the farmer wakes up one morning and finds out that his labor has pulled out in the night.

As an example, we had a farmer and a Texas beet worker that got at odds over a simple misunderstanding. It seemed that when the farmer went to pay the Texas worker one Saturday the worker refused his pay and the farmer thought that the Texas Mexican wanted more money. The farmer contacted me and told me very forcefully that he had made a deal with the Mexican and his family for so much money and he would not pay another red cent and he had told the Mexican to get out of his beet field. I talked to the Texas Mexican and told him that since he had made a deal with the farmer he should stick to it. The Mexican smiled and told me that the farmer had it all wrong. All the Mexican wanted was for the farmer to keep his pay for him, since he was living in a labor house with several other people he didn't know and he just didn't want so much money around but wanted to wait until the whole job was through and then he wanted to send most of it home. I explained this to the farmer and, of course, he was all apologies .... he offered to buy me and the Mexican a new hat if we would forget the whole thing ..... Little things ....

Our activities became manifold as we got more and more into the beet thinning season. The farmer and the worker usually had a written contract calling for the minimum set by the government of \$13.00 an acre for thinning, of \$4.50 for first hoeing, and \$3.00 for second hoeing, or a total of \$20.50 an acre for the spring work season. Quite often the worker would do such a good job on the thinning that the first and second hoeing wouldn't be necessary and the farmer would balk at paying that other \$7.50. We would reason with the farmer, pointing out that the worker had done a good job and was entitled by his contract to receive the whole \$20.50. The farmer saw the light in most cases. In an event of this kind, where the worker has gone ahead and done a good job, making the other hoeings unnecessary, the farmer was money and time ahead and it was only right that he should pay the full amount.

On the other hand, we received complaints from the farmer that the worker was not doing a good job in the thinning, leaving lots of weeds not only in the thinning and blocking, but also in the first and second hoeing. We checked with the workers, telling them they had a contract to do the job right, and if they didn't or their work did not pass inspection by the sugar company fieldmen then they would not get their pay until they went back over the field. After pointing this out to the worker, we generally didn't have much more trouble.



Occasionally, we received complaints from the worker that a field of beets was a little more weedy or a little thinner than the others. They thought that a little more money should be paid for the thinning of such a beet field. We would check the field with the sugar company fieldman and if, in his opinion, the field was a little worse than usual we would check with the farmer and point out that the \$13.00 an acre was only a minimum and in such cases he should pay a little more. Generally he agreed.

### Weather Causes Difficulty

Unfortunately for all concerned 1947 was a bad year during the thinning season. Bad weather all over the beet States made it impossible for the worker to make any more than day-by-day bread .... rain two days, work a half day, rain for another two or three days, another day's work. It was like that all during the months of June and July -- rain, snow, ice, and bitter cold even in summer months. The worker hadn't made enough money to tide him over. Many of them got sick, colds and other related ills hit them, and they had no money because they had spent it for food and clothing. I managed to get them into hospitals and get them emergency treatment for colds and other ailments.

I am aware that a lot of this "extracurricular" activity on my part was not my job, but I felt that if, by a little trouble and a small expense, we could help those people and get them back on the job it was worth the effort. For example, a Texas Mexican by the name of Adolpho Garza from LaFeria, Texas, was down with a bad chest cold. He and his family of five workers were broke and they all stayed around the house waiting on Adolpho to get well. They wouldn't go out in the fields unless he would. Mexicans are peculiar about that, for if the leader or the head of the family is ill and unable to work none of the others will go to work. The farmer was sore because the rest of the family wouldn't work. I got a jar of Vicks and coated the old man's chest, fed him ten grains of quinine, gave him a big glass of hot lemonade, and put three blankets over him. The next morning old Adolpho was a little weak but he didn't have a cold -- and the whole family was back at work.

There were cases where the mother of the family was about to have another baby .... maybe she lived twenty miles from the nearest doctor or hospital. The rest of the family was worried for fear that when her time came there would be nobody around to take care of her. Their work was slowing up. I would contact them, tell them I had made arrangements for the mother and expectant baby .... and when the baby was about to arrive to let me know and I would come to get the mother and take her to the hospital. The workers would go on back into the field satisfied that somebody was around to help them when the time came.

I could go on and on telling of the experiences we have had in the field, some of them humorous and some of them tragic. We did our best to solve each one as it came along, constantly keeping in mind the thought that we were working for the better utilization of labor by keeping people as satisfied and happy as possible.

We organized baseball games between the local people and the Texas Mexicans. We talked to the various theater managers, getting them to devote one night a week to purely Mexican pictures. We prompted Mexican dances or "bailes" on Saturday nights. At these gatherings I would talk to the crowd bringing them the latest information from other agricultural areas -- information that was furnished daily and weekly by the other beet and vegetable States .... answer their many questions, impressing again and again the importance of staying with their contract, bring out the fact that they were "Tejanos" and as such they were obligated to be careful of their actions. These people are proud of the fact that they are Texans and an appeal to their status as Texans is always a strong one. We told them to come to us if they had any misunderstanding with the farmer or with anybody else for that matter. We asked them not to wait until everybody got mad at everybody else before they called us in .... to let us know immediately if there was any little trouble so that we could get there and get it straightened out before time and money were lost.

### Interim Employment

As we neared the completion of the beet thinning season in the beet areas we were getting closer and closer to another of our headaches -- interim employment. There is a period of about two months between beet thinning and potato harvesting -- from the end of July to the end of September. In this period the Texas people are usually idle because there isn't any other agricultural work in the beet areas. A little bean stacking is about all and is not enough to keep 3,000 people busy. Because of this it has been the habit of the Texas people to leave the beet area immediately after the thinning season and very few of them returned. Some of them went into Ohio, Michigan, and Illinois, but most of them went back to Texas to work in the cotton harvest.

As we began to run out of beet thinning work I started a systematic check of the area trying to find out the possibilities of keeping as many people as busy as we could. I checked with construction people, railroads, county road repairing gangs .... anybody that would hire our agricultural worker in his off-season. I explained to these people that work was needed for these beet laborers for the next sixty days -- work that would keep them in bread and beans for the summer so that they would stay in the area and not go wandering off. The Burlington Railroad was very cooperative in this respect. They were putting several extra gangs on the railroad for repairs and they said they would take all the Texas Mexicans I could send them. A large concrete contractor was doing a lot of paving and I got about fifty-five heads-of-families on some of his paving jobs.

I talked over the radio to farmers imploring them to use as much of the Texas labor as they could on their farms in some manner -- cleaning ditches, painting barns, repairing fences -- anything to keep the farmer's labor in "eating money." We always placed heads-of-families on these off-season jobs. If we kept the head of the family busy then the rest of the family was satisfied. In other words, if I got a call for 20 men for the railroad or for some construction job I wouldn't just get the first 20 men but would pick out the "jefe" of a group or the father or older brother of a family and put him on the job. It worked out fine in many respects. The worker was satisfied and so was the farmer. It tickled the farmer to think that we were



trying to keep "his" labor on his place. The farmer, of course, let the crew or family live in his labor house all through the summer at no charge and many farmers helped in the way of food or clothing for the workers. I was humbly proud to have a farmer shake my hand and say "We sure appreciate what you're trying to do for us .... the only trouble is we should have had your kind of help several years ago."

With the help of the different organizations, railroads, construction companies, etc., we managed to keep a large percentage of our labor satisfied until potato picking started. Some of the labor that had gone into Ohio and Michigan and other States began to come back into the Nebraska-Wyoming area. I had been getting letters from this labor all summer long asking me to see the farmer they had worked for in the spring and to tell him to hold his labor house because he was coming back. This labor began to come back now as we started our potato harvest and they also stayed to top our beets.

### Other Problems

There was quite a blow-out at Bayard one night -- about 1,800 Texas Mexicans from all over this area, including some from Greeley, Colorado, Torrington, Wyoming, and Wheatland, Wyoming. They did me the honor of seating me on the platform right between the pictures of Pancho Villa and Francisco Madera. I made a talk, interrupted occasionally by a "Viva Mexico - Viva America" from a few of the boys that had imbibed a little too much of the local fire water. I talked to the crowd explaining the situation here and in other States. In the course of the talk I noticed one or two knives protruding under the shirts of some of the boys. There was quite a number of police patrolling outside of the hall so I casually announced (in Mexican, of course) that if any of the fellows would like to deposit their hardware they could do so by quietly filing back of the platform where I was standing and dropping them into a box. I told them that the police were going to search every one in the hall and that they would lose any knives or pistols they might have on them and go to jail besides. Consequently, the total of our "donation" was thirty-three knives, one hat pin, four ice picks, and one 32 caliber pistol. I turned it all over to the police. They were curious to know where I got such an arsenal but when I explained that it had saved them a lot of possible trouble they thanked me and let it go at that.

Of course, I knew that this personal "disarmament program" was not part of my job but if, on the other hand, I could keep a few of the fellows from getting cut up it would just mean that many more people to work in the potatoes and beets. Among most of us it is whisky and gasoline that will not mix. Among Mexicans it is whisky and knives. A Mexican is easy to set off when he is drinking and when he fights he "ain't kiddin" and if he has a knife handy he uses it ....

Usually the potato harvest is not too difficult. It is a simple matter of paying so much a bushel or hundred pounds for picking and it is a relatively simple harvest. It lasts about three weeks and we usually have good weather. As long as we have anywhere near decent weather and the farmer and the worker are making money our troubles are at a minimum. When we get into the beet harvest it is a horse of another color.

## Wages in the Beet Harvest

Beet harvest or topping generally starts between the 5th and 20th of October. Along with it comes bad weather and trouble. The pay in 1947 was \$1.60 a ton, the minimum under the Sugar Act. The average beet topper will top about six tons a day or make \$9.60 per day. He will top that amount all conditions being favorable -- good weather, good beets, etc. Come a bad day he doesn't make any money because you can't work in the beet fields when they are wet. The Texas worker doesn't like the way his wages are arrived at. No individual man knows how much money he makes from day to day until the farmer gets the tonnage from the beet company's books. Workers have to work in groups and all beets topped are divided equally between them. For example, if six workers are working in a field and they top thirty-five tons, then the money earned is divided equally between the six workers. Even though one or two may have lagged behind and not done as much work as the others all six get the same pay. This is all right where a family group is working a field because the "old man" gets all the money anyway, but it is hard to explain to the groups who are not acquainted or related.

Another thing they don't understand is the word "tare" or residue which is taken off the weight by the processing company for dirt that clings to the beets as they come from the field. In other words, even if a group of workers were able to estimate the amount of beets they topped in a day they still have no way in the world of actually knowing just what the "tare" will be and what their actual earnings will be. They have to take the company's word for it and they don't like that. In most other agricultural work they can tell how much they make from day to day, especially in cotton picking. That is one thing the worker likes so well about cotton picking .... he knows when he has picked a hundred pounds of cotton and it is field weighed in front of his eyes. In beet topping he can't even guess. Since he doesn't trust the farmer and the beet company you can understand his feelings.

Whenever we had complaints of this kind I explained to them that the company couldn't cheat them .... that its books are audited and they have to balance and have to meet government requirements. Most of the time they took my word for it, but they told me that if they had known that such a situation existed they never would have come up into the beet areas. And some didn't plan on coming back. It's a bad situation and I frankly don't know the answer. Of course, it would be impossible to individually check each worker's earnings because they all top and load into the same truck and the truck is weighed at the company's scales. In order for each worker to know how much he earned in a day it would be necessary to have a truck for each man and naturally this cannot be done. That is what I meant when I said trouble started when beet topping began. Of course, the worker always figured his tonnage long and then when he didn't get what he figured he should he got sore and thought the farmer or the beet company was cheating him. Of course, the "tare" off the beets accounts for considerable tonnage .... that was not allowed for by the topper. In his mind he topped six tons of beets, dirt and all, and he figured he was owed \$9.60 for the day's work and when that was not forthcoming he was upset. I talked to the workers, explaining in detail the conditions, but the workers still didn't like it. All we could do was to explain the situation to the workers, promising them that it will all come out right in the end .... in most cases they were satisfied.



## In Retrospect

Further examples could be used to explain our job. I hope I have been able to paint a partial picture of what we are trying to do. I have tried to put it in every day language .... to be honest with you .... plain and to the point. It is true that I have given personal experiences in this part of my report, but these experiences are similar to those of the other liaison representatives. The basic problem was the same in all areas and we solved it in just about the same way -- use of our common sense and knowledge of the workers' problems and the farmers' viewpoints.

It seems to me that our experience has proved that the farmer and the agricultural worker can be brought together on a more sound footing. It has shown the worker his responsibilities to the farmer and it has opened the eyes of the farmer to the problems of the workers. Unfortunately, we have not had very much time to work at it in the best areas. There is still much to be done in the way of education among farmers and workers alike .... it will take time .... many years. It has just started and should continue in these times of food shortages the world over. In the Texas-Mexican migratory movement we have one of the greatest potential agricultural labor forces in the United States but it needs guidance. It needs help and advice, medical care, representatives along the highways and in the fields. It needs men who can sit down between the worker and the farmer and iron out differences and misunderstandings. The farmer needs men who know and understand the Mexican -- men who will go right down the middle taking neither the side of the farmer nor the worker, but will point out the problems and help to correct them.

## CHANGING TECHNIQUES IN SUGAR BEET PRODUCTION REDUCE MIGRATORY LABOR DEMAND

The difficult and costly job of obtaining domestic Mexicans from Texas for employment in the sugar beet fields to the north has in recent years spurred producers to accept technical advances designed to cut hand labor requirements.

### Spring Operations

The labor needs for blocking, thinning, and hoeing sugar beets have been affected only slightly in recent years as a result of technical advances. The production, preparation, and use of single germ segmented seed, thinner seeding, and the practice of mechanically cross-blocking of beets are making progress. These technical changes are designed to take some of the "stoop" out of hand labor work and to cut labor requirements. However, most farmers are reluctant to adopt technical or mechanical practices which may result in a reduced yield; until it has been demonstrated to their satisfaction that their net income will be maintained or increased as a result of such changes.

Workers appear to be interested in developments which tend to remove the drudgery of the sugar beet blocking, thinning, and hoeing jobs, but eye with suspicion any changes which may tend to eliminate the job entirely.

The trends of progress now appear to be either toward improved seed and thinner seeding, or mechanical cross-blocking. Acceptance of these practices is slow where heavy muck soils are encountered. Progressive producers with lighter soils are accepting technical and mechanical changes readily, while others with heavy soils are much slower to adopt similar practices.

In any event, these technical developments will eventually reduce the labor requirements for spring operations in sugar beet production and bring about a demand for greater skills in workers.

### Harvest Operations

The needs for hand labor in the sugar harvest are steadily diminishing season by season because of a gradual increase in the use of machines to perform part or all of the job.

Mechanization of the harvest developed very slowly up to the past two years, because of a shortage of machines and because it has taken much time and patience to perfect machines to overcome operational difficulties arising from soil, weather, and related conditions.

Careful estimates made by State Extension farm labor supervisors indicate that in 1947 about one-fifth of the sugar beet crop grown in States other than California was topped, lifted, and loaded mechanically. In addition, an undetermined proportion of the crop was harvested partially by machines. The progress of mechanization of the sugar beet harvest in California is farther advanced. More than four-fifths of the crop in that State was mechanically harvested in 1947, about two-thirds in 1946, and approximately one-half in 1945.



The progress of a complete job of mechanization, including topping, lifting, and loading of sugar beets in all other States as a whole shows a progressive increase from about 2% of the crop in 1945 to 8% in 1946 and 20% in 1947.

### Machines Displace Workers

Information at hand indicates that about one-third of the hand labor force normally used in the sugar beet harvest in the United States prior to mechanization has now been displaced by machines. Based upon the 1947 estimated acreage of sugar beets for harvest, this hand labor displacement amounts to the equivalent of about 26,000 workers in 1947.<sup>1/</sup> Progress in mechanization, however, varies by geographic areas. California has made the greatest strides, other West Coast and Intermountain States follow next in line, North Plains irrigated areas third, and non-irrigated areas in the North Central States in fourth place.<sup>2/</sup>

State farm labor supervisors in all areas indicate that the rate of mechanization in the sugar beet harvest will be accelerated in 1948, provided machines can be made available to meet the demand. Conditioned on this same premise, they state that mechanically harvesting sugar beets will be an accepted practice by farmers within a five-year period. A few major factors stated as retarding the progress toward complete mechanization of the harvest are ranked in order of importance as follows:

1. Shortage of machines.
2. Imperfection of machines.
3. Soil and climatic conditions upset satisfactory machine operations.
4. High capital investment in equipment in proportion to the size of the sugar beet acreage on the farm.

Since a large proportion of hand labor used in the sugar beet harvest is performed by domestic Mexicans largely from Texas, the mechanization program tends to reduce the labor needed from this source.

### A Look Ahead

There is a general feeling in sugar beet industry circles that the rapid progress being made in the mechanization of the harvest of sugar beets will exert great influence on producers causing them to voluntarily adopt hand labor saving practices in the spring operations. If such a feeling

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- <sup>1/</sup> It is assumed that each worker will top, pull, and load by hand about 10 acres of sugar beets during the average harvest season.
  - <sup>2/</sup> West Coast and Intermountain States included here are: Idaho, Utah, Oregon, and Washington. North Plains States include Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, and the irrigated valleys of western North Dakota.

actually materializes, and it appears logical that it might, the numbers of migratory workers in the "trek" to sugar production jobs may dwindle to a trickle within a relatively few years. At present, the spring operations of blocking, thinning, and hoeing require a total hand labor force approximating 80,000 workers. These jobs last for a period of about two months. Weeding and irrigation jobs during the summer and early fall require only a small fraction of this spring work force. Providing work for these people during this interim period has always been difficult. As a consequence, much of the spring labor either returns to their homes or moves on to crop jobs elsewhere.

Thus, re-recruiting for the fall harvest has always been necessary. Cold weather in the northern sugar beet producing States and more attractive jobs in the cotton producing States have made this recruiting job expensive and difficult.

For the several reasons previously stated, it seems quite apparent that in the not-too-distant future sugar beet production in the United States will require semi-skilled or highly skilled workers. Farmers of California have practically reached that point now and producers in other States are rapidly changing over. The present economic pressure upon technical specialists in the fields of plant breeding, farm management, and agricultural engineering to step up labor saving practices in sugar beet production is reaping results.

Concurrent with advances in technical practices may come a period of downward adjustment of wage scales for hand labor and because of the competition between men and machines. Greater output per worker and better quality of hand work may result.

The changing situations will definitely alter the pattern of migration of farm workers out of Texas and nearby States. Sugar beet producers, on the other hand, will be needing more assistance with training programs for workers so they might better perform the more skilled jobs in a modernized sugar beet production industry. The economic and social aspects of these developments may be far reaching among migratory farm workers and in the communities in which they attempt to make a livelihood.

### Recommendations

1. The educational work among domestic Mexicans in Texas and in other States of employment by Extension liaison agents and others have resulted in a mounting interest among both workers and employers. Farmers say their workers are better behaved than usual, stick to their jobs longer, and keep themselves and their living quarters cleaner. Both workers and employers stand to gain in this trend toward better living and working conditions. The need for a continuing program of improved employer-employee relationship is self-evident.

2. The liaison program carried on in Texas and later expanded to other States, as presently organized, has proved to be a very effective means of getting greater output from workers and improved living, working, and relationship conditions. This type of approach has great possibilities for the future. Present gains should not be lost through inaction on the part of employers and workers or their representatives. It is recommended



that the responsibilities for successful operation of this type of program be shared alike by States of labor supply and States of need. Federal coordination is needed because of the interstate relationships.

3. A guide to farm jobs folder containing a map of the areas of employment, crop information, main routes of travel, and location of reception and information centers is a need not yet satisfied. The development of an improved guide is essential to any planned program which may be designed to serve migratory farm workers interested in following the sugar beet and related crop jobs.

4. The reception centers which provided shelter, cooking, showers, and laundry facilities for migratory workers en route to crop jobs have been thoroughly appreciated by domestic Mexicans. Careful considerations should be given to their future possibilities. A few of them may need a change of location to better serve the workers. New ones may need to be added. This is a program which has been appreciated by the workers.

5. Much progress has been made in recent years by sugar beet producers in the construction and improvement of housing for migratory farm workers. Workers have a growing appreciation of more comfortable homes. Suitable housing for year-round workers will become increasingly important as mechanization of sugar beet production progresses, since workers can be used then more readily on a full-time basis on most farms. Housing programs for farm workers should be a recognized need along with similar programs of better housing for farm families.

6. Many domestic Mexicans have become oriented to higher standards of living while in war service and now desire better housing and food, higher education, more recreational, social and religious opportunities. A goodly portion of such people either find what they want in work areas or drop out of the migratory movement pattern and are lost to agriculture. Farmers are very slow to recognize this development, but those who do, find no difficulty in securing and retaining good workers. Herein lies an educational job among employers.

7. In view of the rapid progress toward possible complete mechanization of the sugar beet harvest and a slower trend toward elimination of much of the hand labor in spring operations, it appears that both workers and farmers need help with a training program designed to develop new skills in migratory farm workers.

8. Workers are being forewarned directly and indirectly of the possible displacement of hand labor by machines and other labor-saving devices in sugar beet and related crop production. As a consequence, many of them tend to respond to such competition by performing more and better quality work. Producers are capitalizing on this development and consequently are getting more "choosy" in hiring workers and more particular as to the quality and quantity of work done by them. Whether this is self-discipline on the part of the worker or forced discipline when applied by the producer, the result may be greater net income to both.

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